

Vernon Hills, IL - During a press conference held today in Vernon Hills, U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) announced he will personally carry holiday cards & letters to Illinois service men and women in Iraq.

Kirk is heading to Iraq with other members of Congress to evaluate the progress being made toward nationwide elections in January, 2005. Congressman Kirk was joined by Vernon Hills Police Chief Mark Fleischhauer, Libertyville Police Chief Pat Carey, and Penny Pullen, President of Republican Women of Wheeling. The congressman applauded their work and the efforts of many volunteers to bring some holiday cheer to our military family.

"Nothing boosts the morale and spirits of Americans in uniform better than a letter from home," said Congressman Kirk. "This is particularly true during the holiday season. To family and friends here at home wishing to send a card or letter to someone they know serving in Iraq, I will ensure it gets there in time for the holidays."

The deadline for mailing a card or letter to Iraq for the holidays has already passed. Kirk's mission gives military families and friends another chance to make sure their letters arrive in time for the holidays.

Kirk highlighted the work of the Vernon Hills Police Department (VHPD). The VHPD adopted two military units currently serving abroad - the United States Army National Guard 106th Aviation Battalion in Iraq and the United States Marine Corps HMH 462 in Afghanistan. The program, called 'Blue Line For The Front Line,' collected comfort items from area businesses and civic groups which were sent over in care packages for soldiers and Marines serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. To date, the Vernon Hills team has shipped over 112 boxes to our troops.

The Libertyville Police Department joined the effort, serving as a drop off area for residents wishing to donate items. An individual, wishing to remain anonymous, donated \$1,000 that the police used to buy items at Target. Target also donated to the cause.

Kirk also recognized the efforts of eighth grade students at Washburne Junior High School in Winnetka. The kids are putting together care packages that include high-demand items like hard

candy, handiwipes and the latest DVDs. Kirk also welcomed the efforts of the Republican Women of Wheeling that collected over 20 boxes of comfort items for the troops that Kirk will deliver when he visits Iraq.

"I am grateful for the leadership and community service of the Vernon Hills Police Department, the Libertyville Police, Washburne Junior High and the Republican Women of Wheeling – all volunteers who donated their time and efforts to bring holiday cheer to our troops," said Congressman Kirk. "In the spirit of the season, they are providing a much-needed boost to our brave Americans in uniform who will stand guard during the holidays."

Congressman Kirk also provided details for several organizations, with their web sites that have been particularly helpful to the troops. These organizations include:

<http://www.adoptaplatoon.org/> , including Operation "Holiday Smile"

<http://www.lettersfromhome.org/> , including its program to ensure every soldier gets mail

<http://www.nmcrrs.org/> , the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society

<http://www.aerhq.org/> , Army Emergency Relief

<http://www.afas.org/> , the Air Force Aid Society

Congressman Kirk asked that only cards and letters be delivered to his office. Due to space limitations on the military aircraft, he will not be able to carry packages. All cards or letters must be received in his Deerfield office:

Congressman Mark Kirk

Suite 200

102 Wilmot Road

Deerfield, Illinois 60015

All cards and letters must be properly addressed, with name, rank, unit and military APO, including correct postage. Kirk will deliver this mail to the U.S. Army's central mail processing facility in Baghdad for final delivery.

The deadline for receipt of cards or letters in Deerfield is 12:00 noon, Thursday, December, 9.

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